

WE CLAIM:

1. A method for licensing software, comprising:
receiving an electronic request for a license that includes information associated with an end-user and an identifier associated with a software product;
employing the information to authenticate the end-user; and
employing a Licensing Authority to digitally sign the license that enables access to the software product, when the end-user is authentic.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the Licensing Authority operates substantially similar to a Certification Authority in a Public-Key Infrastructure (PKI).
3. The method of claim 1, wherein receiving the electronic request further comprises, receiving the electronic request from at least one of a web form and an electronic-mail message.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein employing the information to authenticate the end-user further comprises employing at least one of a financial institution, an employer, an educational institution, and a government institution to validate the information.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the information the end-user further comprises at least one of a name, address, email address, telephone number, credit information, credit card information, employment information, and driver's license.
6. The method of claim 1, further comprising, providing notification on how to access the digitally signed license, wherein the notification comprises at least one of an email message and a webpage.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein the digitally signed license enables access to at least one software product.

8. A method of using a public key infrastructure for licensing software, comprising:
- forwarding a request for a license to access a software product to a Licensing Authority, wherein the request comprises information associated with an end-user;
 - receiving a digitally signed license from the Licensing Authority, when the Licensing Authority determines the end-user is authentic; and
 - employing the digitally signed license to enable access to the software product.
9. The method of claim 8, wherein the Licensing Authority operates substantially similar to a Certification Authority in a Public-Key Infrastructure (PKI).
10. The method of claim 8, wherein the digitally signed license format is substantially similar to a Public-Key Certificate in an Internet X.509 Public Key Infrastructure (PKI):
11. The method of claim 8, wherein the digitally signed license further comprises an extension field that includes at least one of a Universal Resource Locator (URL), a hash, and software product identifier.
12. The method of claim 11, wherein the digitally signed license further comprises a digital signature associated with the Licensing Authority, wherein the digital signature is created using at least one a Rivest-Shamir-Adleman (RSA) algorithm, Digital Signature Standard (DSS) algorithm, and a Diffie-Hellman algorithm.
13. The method of claim 8, further comprising receiving a rejection notice from the Licensing Authority, if the Licensing Authority determines the end-user is unauthentic.

14. The method of claim 8, wherein the Licensing Authority determines the end-user is authentic further comprises requesting validation of the information from at least one of a financial institution, an employer, an educational institution, and a government institution.

15. A system for electronic licensing of a software product, comprising:
a client computer configured to provide an electronic request for a license;

a Licensing Authority, coupled to the client computer, that is configured to perform actions, including:

receiving the electronic request for the license that includes information associated with an end-user and an identifier associated with the software product;

employing the information to authenticate the end-user; and
if the end-user is authentic, digitally signing the license, and
notifying the client computer where to obtain the digitally signed license, wherein the digitally signed license enables access to the software product.

16. The system of claim 15, further comprising:

a software distribution server, coupled to the client computer, that is configured to perform actions, including:

receiving a request for the software product;

receiving the digitally signed license associated with the software product;

determining if the digitally signed license is valid, and if the digitally signed license is valid, providing access to the software product associated with the valid license.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein determining if the license is valid further comprises examining at least one of the digital signature associated with

Licensing Authority, a validity period, a serial number, an extension field, and a license revocation list.

18. The system of claim 16, wherein determining if the license is valid further comprises:

- requesting a license revocation list from a Licensing Repository;
- determining whether the digitally signed license is identified within the license revocation list; and
- denying access to the software product, if the license is identified within the license revocation list.

19. The system of claim 15, wherein the client computer is further configured to perform actions further comprising:

- receiving notification of how to obtain the digitally signed license;
- installing the digitally signed license; and
- employing the digitally signed license to enable access to the software product.

20. The system of claim 15, wherein the Licensing Authority operates substantially similar to a Certification Authority in a Public-Key Infrastructure (PKI).

21. The system of claim 15, wherein the digitally signed license format is substantially similar to a Public-Key Certificate in an Internet X.509 Public Key Infrastructure (PKI).

22. A system for electronically licensing a software product, comprising:

- means for receiving an electronic request for a license that includes information associated with an end-user and an identifier associated with a software product;
- means for employing the information to authenticate the end-user; and

means for employing a Licensing Authority to digitally sign the license when the end-user is authentic, wherein the digitally signed license is substantially similar to a Public-Key Certificate in an Internet Public Key Infrastructure (PKI), and wherein the digitally signed license enables access to the software product.